Postmaster says new post office will be built; Moro makes suggestions

By BARBARA WROBLESKI

"I hate to drop a bombshell here," Postmaster Gerald Barrett said, "But this afternoon I received word that Pettinato and Mercanti Construction of Clarks Summit was awarded the contract to build the city's new post office." Barrett made the announcement last Thursday at Berean Baptist Church Hall, at a public meeting coordinated by the Carbondale Historical Society, intended for the expression of information and opinions regarding the pros and cons of building a new post office.

About 45 area residents attended the public forum, and a majority of them commented during the two-hour session that they weren't in favor of seeing a new building constructed. S. Robert Powell, Society president, presided at the gathering.

Postmaster Barrett noted that the contractor, who bid $560,000 for the project, will have ten days from the date the contract was awarded to meet payment of a performance bond, and once met, preliminary paperwork on building specifications will begin within three weeks. Within six weeks, grounds will be broken for the new structure on Dundaff Street, on a 1.6 acre site located directly across from Trichilo Wholesale Foods. The building must be ready for occupancy within 365 days, "So the post office will be operating in the new facility by this fall or February 1984 at the latest," Barrett commented.

The local postmaster pointed out that in 1971 the Postmaster General was removed form the President's cabinet, and the postal service was to become a self-sufficient organization, independent of federal government funding by 1984. "The money the postal service receives comes from the sale of philatelic items (stamp collectors' materials)," Barrett said, adding "No tax money and no federal funds are going to be used for the new building.

In light of the present post office building's historical importance, emphasized by the Historical Society, Barrett stated that when the building is sold, the postal service will impose strict restrictions on the new owner, who will not be allowed to make any alterations to the structure without permission of the Pennsylvania State Historical Society.

Barrett stated that Postmaster General William Bolger informed him that the existing post office building is inadequate for employees' efficiency in providing postal services and handling the ever-expanding volume of mail. When questioned by audience members why a new building is needed since the population of Carbondale has decreased over the years, Barrett said the volume of mail has expanded. "At the local office, we handle mail to and from Carbondale, Childs, as well as Fell, Carbondale and Greenfield townships, and RD Carbondale. And on January 22, we'll be starting a second RD Carbondale route," he added. The delivery population of the local post office is 24,000.

Barrett said that most of the city's mail is cancelled at the Scranton post office because it has high speed machines than can cancel 3,600 letters a minute, while the machines at the local office can cancel only 360 pieces a minute. Louis Scombordi, superintendent of the local post office, noted that nine million pieces of mail were handled at the local facility last year.

Scombordi noted that the new building will provide 2,000 square feet more working space than the present building offers, and said the extra room is necessary not for new equipment but for space for the present equipment and mail. Every morning, the employees contend with overcrowded conditions. "They have to move mail conveyances in order to get around the place to do their jobs. It wastes time, and I think conditions jeopardize their safety. The building just isn't functional anymore," Scombrodi pointed out.

While the new building will provide more efficient working conditions for employees, it will also have a convenience box at which motorists can easily mail letters, and will also have an accessible area for businesses to pick up and deliver bulk mail, access ramps for the handicapped, and parking space for 66 cars.

Several members of the audience pointed out that the building, to be located on Dundaff Street, may be very inconvenient to reach, especially for elderly persons residing or shopping in the downtown area. After some discussion concerning the creation of a bridge from John Street, over the river to allow residents to walk directly to Dundaff from Main Street, Barrett stated that the post office will advertise for a contract station on Main Street, possibly in the present building, for everyone's convenience.

Barrett mentioned that the decision to build the new post office is the result of a 15-year projection study by postal officials who examined all possible sites in the city. He commented that the new building will be an asset to the community, which already has numerous, new, attractive buildings. The postal service considers the new facility an investment in Carbondale's future.

In addition to Barrett and Scombordi, Councilwoman Charlotte Moro was an invited guest speaker. In her address, she noted, "I think the important thing for all of us to consider now is the old post office building, one of the most beautiful and classically designed buildings in our community. It would be a sin to see it destroyed or deteriorate like the M&M Bank building did before Dave Adams bought it and began to restore it to its original beauty."

Mrs. Moro pointed out that the present post office would make a beautiful and efficient municipal building, and would be more economical in terms of energy savings. This year, taxpayers will pay $15,000 for heat and utilities at city hall. But on the negative side are the costs of buying the building and disposing of the present city hall.

"We have no definite figures on what it would take to convert the post office into a city building, but a rough guess would be about $150,000," Mrs. Moro commented. She added that she intends to check with Senator Robert Mellow and Congressman Joseph McDade to see if any state or federal grants are available to accomplish such a goal.

The councilwoman suggested that if the municipal building does move into the present postal facility, City Hall should be turned over to the Carbondale Historical Society for the creation of a community museum. She concluded her remarks by saying, "I really think a working committee involving the historical society, interested citizens and public officials should be formed to study these matters so that well thought out recommendations can be made to the mayor and council when they deliberate the future of our present city building and the post office building.

Historical Society president S. Robert Powell told the NEWS that if the city does eventually turn City Hall over the the Society, it would certainly accept it, but maintaining it would be a tremendous job. "But we would do our best to accept the responsiblity and look to government funding to maintain the bulding in the years ahead," Powell added.